

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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FM AMEMBASSY NIAMEY

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8813

C O N F I D E N T I A L NIAMEY 5814S

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, NG

SUBJECT: CABINET CHANGES

1. MINOR CABINET CHANGES ANNOUNCED DECEMBER 12.

MINISTER OF ECONOMIC AFFAIRS ALFIDJA IS DROPPED FROM GOVERNMENT AND REPLACED BY MAI MAIGANA, WHO HAS BEEN SERVING UP TO NOW AS CHIEF OF CABINET OF GON. PRESIDENT KOUNTCHE RESUMES DEFENSE PORTFOLIO WHICH HE HAD HELD FOR TWO YEARS FOLLOWING ADVENT TO POWER. NEW POST OF SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS ESTABLISHED.

2. COMMENT: WE BELIEVE ALFIDJA'S DEPARTURE HAS A LOT TO DO WITH FRENCH BUSINESS COMMUNITY WHICH FOUND HIM DIFFICULT, INACCESSIBLE, AND ARBITRARY IN DEALING WITH DAY-TO-DAY COMPANY PROBLEMS. SENIOR FRENCH BUSINESSMEN HAVE LONG REGARDED ALFIDJA AS HARD-LINER AND DOCTRINAIRE. CONSEQUENTLY THEY HAVE BEEN IN HABIT OF TAKING PROBLEMS DIRECTLY TO KOUNTCHE AND UNDOUBTEDLY HAVE PUSHED HARD FOR ALFIDJA'S REMOVAL WITH CHIEF OF STATE. WHETHER ALFIDJA'S BAD REPUTATION MERITED OR NOT, IN MAI MAIGANA, KOUNTCHE HAS NAMED A MINISTER WHO IS EXPERIENCED, POLISHED, AND SAVVY IN HIS DEALINGS WITH FOREIGNERS ON ECONOMIC AFFAIRS. THUS, MOVE IS ANOTHER STEP BY KOUNTCHE TO SOLIDIFY AND BOLSTER REGIME'S IMAGE OF GOOD SENSE AND REALISM WHERE FOREIGN ECONOMIC INTERESTS

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ARE CONCERNED. A MIXED-BLOOD TUAREG, ALFIDJA BROUGHT A DEGREE OF NORTHERN BALLAST TO AN OTHERWISE HEAVILY DJERMA GOVERNMENT, BUT MAI MAIGANA, A HAUSA-FULANI, SEEMS A GOOD CHOICE ON ETHNIC GROUNDS AS WELL. ALFIDJA, WE UNDERSTAND, IS IN LINE FOR JOB WITH IBRD.

3. TAKING DEFESNE PORTFOILIO FROM IDRISSA (WHO CONTINUES

AS MINISTER OF EDUCATION) COULD BE READ AS A POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS MOVE SINCE IDRISSE IS UNDOUBTEDLY NUMBER TWO MAN HERE. EVERYTHING WE SEE, HOWEVER, SUGGESTS KOUNTCHE AND IDRISSE REMAIN VERY CLOSE AND WE WOULD BE SURPRISED IF SHUFFLE OF PORTFOLIOS HAS ANYTHING OTHER THAN ORGANIZATIONAL EXPLANATION. FOREIGN MINISTER DJERMAKOYE TOLD AMBASSADOR THAT PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS UNDERLAY KOUNTCHE'S DECISION, I.E., RESPONSIBILITIES AT EDUCATION AND DEFENSE ARE HEAVEY AND GROWING, AND IDRISSE RISKED SPREADING HIMSELF TOO THIN.

4. POST OF SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS GOES TO YAHAYA TOUNKARA WHOM WE DO NOT KNOW WELL, BUT OBJECT OF EXERCISE IS WELCOME ONE OF BEEFING UP GOVERNMENT'S CAPACITY TO MOUNT EFFECTIVE HEALTH PROGRAMS.JAMES

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